Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Stem Cell Research Facts, Not Rhetoric

May 20, 2005

Dear Colleague:

Misinformation continues to be circulated regarding the use of embryonic stem cell research. We would like to set the record straight.

Some have said that adult stem cell research lends itself to more promising outcomes. This is merely rhetoric. Here are three undisputed scientific facts:

1. Adult stem cell research is not a substitute for embryonic stem cell research. Because of the limitations of the current restrictive stem cell policy, there has not yet been an opportunity for scientists to thoroughly study and compare embryonic stem cells to adult stem cells, nor have there been opportunities to explore therapeutic applications. It is therefore premature to conclude that embryonic stem cells are proven to be less effective.

2. Adult stem cells are not better. It is simply not true that adult stem cells can differentiate into a greater variety of tissues. Many recent studies have disproved claims that adult stem cells could differentiate into a wide variety of tissue types. This argument is not based on sound science. Because of their unique ability to differentiate, embryonic stem cells certainly have the potential to produce a broader range of cell types, including beta and islet cells.

3. Embryonic stem cells are viable and effective. There is no evidence that properly selected embryonic stem cell lines are genetically unstable.

We cannot yet predict what types of treatment and cures stem cell research will yield; however, prominent scientists and Nobel Laureates believe that these diseases may include Parkinson's, cancer, juvenile diabetes, Rett Syndrome, ALS, and many others. In order to make the most rapid progress, it is necessary to allow scientists to study all kinds of stem cells in order to resolve these questions and improve the science.

Finally, it is important to recognize that we view the in vitro fertilization (IVF) process very seriously. Even though many of these IVF embryos were originally reserved for possible future pregnancy, IVF researchers have indicated that most of these embryos will not be used by couples and will eventually be discarded or frozen. In addition, if offered the option to donate these embryos for research rather than discard them, many more couples will choose that option. In a study conducted by the Newcastle (UK) Fertility Society, researchers found that 57% of couples who were asked to consider donation to research, chose that option.

Scientific progress is dependent on collaboration, openness and opportunity. We have only just begun to explore the promise and potential of stem cells. The current stem cell research policy is limiting our full understanding of stem cells. It must be changed so that the science can prevail.

The science surrounding embryonic stem cell research is complex. Please do not hesitate to contact Meghan Taira with Rep. DeGette (5-4431) or Elizabeth Wenk in Rep. Castle's office (5-4165) with any questions.

Sincerely,

Diana DeGette
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Member of Congress

Mike Castle
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